

APRIL 2, 2003

HEALTH UPDATE

State Homeland Security Officials Urge Safe Mail Handling

State homeland security officials caution all businesses, government offices and individuals to continue, resurrect or implement the mail handling procedures adopted nationwide after the anthrax events in 2001.

“Although we have received no specific threats, the war with Iraq, as well as the anticipated post-war era, raises concerns about the possibility of terrorist incidents,” said Tim Wiedrich, chief of the Department of Health’s Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Section. “We want to remind the public of the steps they can take to keep themselves safe at home and at work.”

Careful handling of letters and packages can greatly reduce the possibility of exposure to bioterrorism agents such as anthrax, according to the North Dakota Department of Health. The Department of Health recommends the following guidelines for handling mail:

If you receive a suspicious letter or package

- 1) Handle any suspicious letter/package with care; do not shake it or bump it. Do not open, smell or taste the letter/package.
- 2) Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water.
- 3) Contact local law enforcement or call 911.

If the parcel is open and/or a threat is identified

- 1) Do not handle the letter/package or its contents. Leave it, evacuate the immediate vicinity and close the room.
- 2) Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water.
- 3) Contact local law enforcement or call 911.

For more information, contact Tim Wiedrich or Larry Shireley, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2372.

Categories of Health Alert messages:

- *Health Alert conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.*
- *Health Advisory provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.*
- *Health Update provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary.*

This message is being sent to state agencies, local public health units, clinics, hospitals, physicians, tribal health, North Dakota Nurses Association, North Dakota Long Term Care Association, North Dakota Healthcare Association, North Dakota Medical Association, and hospital public information officers.